

Kathmandu Institute of Theology

**“A Biblical Instruction on Christian Alcoholism in a Religious
Pluralistic Society”**

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Introduction:

The focus of this paper is to investigate the problem of alcoholism in a religiously plural society. It describes the core causes of it. Furthermore, the researcher elaborates on the consequences of alcoholism in the family, person, society, etc. Moreover, the writer provides biblical teaching on alcoholism by studying some passages and verses on drunkenness. It also explains its influences on Nepali Christians. Finally, it demonstrates the responsibility of Christians, church, and church leaders to avoid alcoholism.

Chapter 1 - Understanding Alcoholism

Alcoholism, the excessive and continuous use of alcohol has been taken as sin in the context of morality. It is also taken as a disease because it results in physical, emotional, etc., weaknesses. Moreover, it can be controlled.¹ It is a severe problem as it directly affects the social and family lives, mental and physical health, and makes the alcoholic irresponsible of his duty in various fields. Alcoholism harms the social relations and the performance of drinkers continuously.² It is an illness in that the consumer uses alcohol

¹ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (USA: Word Inc., 1988), 488-489.

² Howard J. Clinebell, *Understanding and Counseling the Alcoholic: Through Religion and Psychology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 19, Internet Archive.

continuously and excessively, which brings various problems in his personal and family life.³

Chapter 2 - Alcoholic Problem in Religious Plural Nepal

In Nepal use of alcohol is found to be based on traditions that are either restricted totally or allowed to use openly. However, nowadays, many people, regardless of their traditions and cultural values, are using alcohol due to various reasons.⁴

2.1 - Reasons behind alcoholism in Nepal

Alcohol in Nepal has many religious uses and cultural values. People have different cultures and particular ways of practicing rituals. Some ethnic groups tend to use alcohol more in their several celebrations of festivals. One best example is the Tamang group who uses *Jand/Chhang* (intoxicant) or *Rakshi* (homemade alcohol) during their different cultural practices such as ancestral worship, wedding, naming rituals, death rituals, etc. They even believe that the deceased family maintains good prestige in the society if they provide more alcohol to the relatives in the conduct of death rituals (*ghewa*). Also, in some communities like Tamang serving alcohol to guests is taken as an act of respect.⁵ On the occasion of *Indra Jatra* in Kathmandu devotees especially from Newar community provides large amount of local

³Pitman Medical Publishing Company (London), Aspects of Alcoholism (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1963), 9, Internet Archive.

⁴ Krishna B. Thapa, Social, Economic and Administrative History of Nepal (Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1995), 65-66.

⁵ Rupa Dhital et al., Alcohol and Drug Use in Nepal: *with reference to children* (Kathmandu: CWIN, 2001), 37-38, PDF eBook.

beer to people as a token of blessing of their god. Newari people use excessive amount of beer or alcohol while carrying out their various ceremonies. Even in sherpa community beer has religious value.⁶

Through a survey and interviews conducted in Nepal, it is found that people are using alcohol even as a foodstuff. Some have been using it as a medicine for refreshment that helps them forget their various mental, family, social, etc., problems. When the person who does not drink spends time with friends or relatives who use alcohol, the person is also forced to have alcohol. If there are many alcohol consumers in a society, the non-consumer is directly influenced to use alcohol. Besides, in Nepal, many families are farmers, so they make alcohol in their homes as they cultivate more grains like millet that is often used to make local alcohol (*Rakshi*). So, even parents use alcohol in some families, and many children follow. Children and youths who are far from their parents and are not getting proper care from their parents are also using alcohol. Moreover, the government is gaining huge revenue from alcohol industries. So, the government is not controlling its production. As a result, alcohol is often made even in the locality and is easily found in many hotels, bars, restaurants, etc.⁷ So, people have easy access to alcohol.

⁶ Ramesh Raj Kunwor, "Nepalese Society: Liquor and Culture, " http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/ancientnepal/pdf/ancient_nepal_81_01.pdf, accessed March 6, 2022.

⁷ Rupa Dhital, Alcohol and Drug Use in Nepal, 38-45.

The person who often sees the use of alcohol in movies, TV, magazines, etc. may be influenced to use or abuse alcohol.⁸ It is found that media lines even influence some Nepalese. Numerous advertisements are found in Newspapers that stimulate people to use alcohol. Twenty-five weeklies and daily newspapers of Nepal were making 245 ads on alcohol just within two months – January and February, 2000.⁹

2.2 - Consequences of Alcoholism

Alcoholism has led to many family issues and violence in society. Some of its examples are rape, theft, murders, etc. That results in insecurity in the society. Because of consuming more alcohol, parents often quarrel in simple issues also, and many have lived separately, and some have even divorced. Children who observe and face such situations in the family feel insecure in their home itself. Many children have learned to drink alcohol from their parents themselves. Bad feelings and behaviors are developed in children by such situations.¹⁰ They even may think that their parents do not love them, and they may start worrying. Taking stress at such an age disturbs their concentration in anything and performance in any field.¹¹ Drinking parents become careless in their family environment. An alcoholic spends money to buy more alcohol, and as a result, the low-income family may not fulfill the family's requirements. Children may not get proper education and

⁸ June Hunt, Alcohol and Drug Abuse: *Breaking Free and Staying*, (n.p.), Christian Library.

⁹ Rupa Dhital, Alcohol and Drug Use in Nepal, 42-43

¹⁰ Samuele Bacchiocchi, Wine in the Bible: *A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages* (USA: Biblical Perspectives, 2001), 250-254, PDF eBook.

¹¹ Nada J. Estes and Edith Heinemann, Alcoholism: *Development, consequences and interventions* (Saint Louis: The C.C. Mosby Company, 1977), 154-156, Internet Archive.

facilities. Frequent quarrels occur in the family. The society looks down on such families and the alcoholic person.¹²

Alcohol directly affects our body and organs like the brain, heart, liver, etc. It results in high blood pressure and increases the possibility of heart attacks.¹³ Using alcohol more and more will cause various physical weaknesses and diseases like liver disease, stomach cancer, disturbance in the smooth function of the brain as well as the nervous system. The person who drinks alcohol more expresses feelings unpleasantly and may not think properly. So, alcohol affects the person psychologically. Alcoholism also damages the spiritual growth of the person.¹⁴

Intoxication directly hampers the psychology of a person. Alcoholism makes an alcoholic unaware of his identity. Then that person's attitudes go against his fundamental beliefs, values, and norms. Also, negative feelings such as guilt, remorse, etc. develop in them that control their lives. They are always frightened and lose their self-esteem. Alcoholics feel different from others and try to prove themselves unique from them. Due to this habit, they are separated from others and become the victims of loneliness. Primarily those who drink alcohol a lot go through depression. They have spiritual emptiness and also do not find any purpose for living. Alcoholism leads people to become irresponsible. In many cases, they do not admit that drinking has been a problem for them even though they face problems in

¹² Clinebell, *Understanding and Counseling the Alcoholic*, 21.

¹³ Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible*, 257-260.

¹⁴ Collins, *Christian Counseling*, 495.

social relations, health, work, etc. Rather, they always give excuses and reasons to drink.¹⁵

Chapter 3 - Nepali Christian Alcoholism

Some new converts Christians and even born-again Christians who are baptized take alcohol in Nepal. A person in New Heaven Church takes alcohol several times even though he is attending church frequently. He is a driver and often gets drunk. His wife was telling that he has many friends who drink alcohol, and he has to spend more time with them during work. As the pastor asked him the reasons for drinking, he said that he did not want to drink but often drinks when there are quarrels at home with his wife or children. He even said that to forget family tensions and worries, he was consuming alcohol. Till today he drinks when problems arise in the family. There is one believer who runs a hotel. He is born again Christian, but he drinks alcohol on some special occasions. Before conversion, he used to drink a lot. So, in festivals like Dashain, he is influenced by his non-Christian friends to drink. In Dashain, almost every Hindu drink alcohol when gathering with friends and relatives. A few years back, only that believer drank alcohol extremely in Dashain that he lost consciousness and lost 3-4 lacks in gambling. There is a woman who often drinks alcohol. She does not come to church frequently. At the same time, the pastor visits her and warns them not to drink. She always reasons and makes excuses to drink and admits that she will not drink next time. She says that there are

¹⁵ Estes, *Alcoholism: Development, consequences and interventions*, 11-13.

tensions in the family, and she drinks to forget those. When someone says alcohol does not do so, she argues that it works for her. Some believers drink when they go to the village and meet with non-Christian relatives.¹⁶

So, many Christians have not left their old habit of drinking and still drink alcohol on various occasions. Moreover, they drink under the influence of friends and relatives who drink. They have easy access to alcohol. Also, they have an old concept that was in the time when they were not converted that alcohol is a solution to their problems. So, when problems arise, then they drink.

Chapter 4 - Biblical Concept of Alcoholism

Excessive or intense use of wine, i.e., drunkenness/alcoholism, is strictly condemned in the Bible, whereas moderate use of wine is allowed.

Moreover, those who have entirely kept themselves from using it are adored (Numbers 6:2-4; Judges 13:5-7, Jeremiah 35; Matthew 11:18).¹⁷

4.1 - Old Testament

Drinking wine is not condemned by the Bible; instead, it was taken as a gift from God (Psalm 104:14-15; Joel 2:24, 3:18). In Israel also, the wine had religious value and was practiced. However, drunkenness is condemned in the Bible. In Old Testament, there are many incidents where the excessive

¹⁶ Shalom Limbu, interview by author, Kathmandu, March 5, 2022.

¹⁷ Oliver J. Morgan, "Practical Theology, Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: *Methodological and Biblical Considerations*," *Journal of Ministry in Addiction and Recovery*, no.5 (n.p.: The Haworth Press, Inc., 1998), 39, accessed March 5, 2022.

use of wine, i.e., the strong drink, has brought dangerous results.¹⁸ Many such incidents have been taken as a punishment from God even for their correction. The daughters of Lot lay with him, and Lot, their father, did not know when his daughters came and lay with him as he was drunk (Genesis 19:31-34). Ammon was murdered in his state of drunkenness (2 Samuel 13:28-29).¹⁹ In proverbs 23:20, 29-35, warnings are given to drunkards. This portion talks about the results of excessive use of wine that is drunkenness, and its painful consequences.²⁰ These verses explain that an alcohol addiction brings physical, mental, and emotional pain.²¹ In Genesis 9:21, the act of Noah is taken as sin because he was drunk and became unconscious, laying naked.²² This passage explains the failure of Noah in keeping morality before his sons due to the consumption of more wine that was a strong drink. This incident shows the harm that the drinker and his family faces.²³ Isaiah 5:11 also condemns drunkenness for pleasure.²⁴ Jeremiah 23:9 suggests that a drunken man loses his vitality and health.²⁵ The Old Testament mentions a lot of adverse effects that drunken man faces such as loss of bearing (Job 12:25), physical weakness (Jeremiah 23:9; 1 Kings 16:9-

¹⁸ Morgan, *Practical Theology, Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism*, 39.

¹⁹ Sheldon C. Seller, "Alcohol Abuse in the Old Testament," *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, no. 1 (Great Britain: Pergamon Press Ltd, 1985), 69, accessed March 5, 2022.

²⁰ Art Farstad, *Proverbs*, Believers Bible Commentary, ed. William MacDonald (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), LDLS.

²¹ The New American Commentary

²² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Genesis*, The Bible Exposition Commentary (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1996), LDLS.

²³ Kenneth A. Matthew, *Genesis*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1996), LDLS.

²⁴ Terry Briley, *The College Press NIV Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 2000), LDLS.

²⁵ Seller, *Alcohol Abuse in the Old Testament*, 71.

10), affects the brain, makes anxious, lustful, quarrelsome (Hoses 4:13; Proverbs 31:5, 23:29-30), etc.²⁶

Observing the severe consequences of excessive use of wine in the Old Testament, i.e., drunkenness, it can be concluded that alcoholism is not permitted and beneficial.

4.2 - New Testament

In Luke 21:34, Jesus has clearly warned against drunkenness. In Matthew 24:45-51, Jesus explains that the master will punish an unfaithful servant who spends time with drinkers and drinks.²⁷ Ephesians 5:18 explains that drunkenness is debauchery.²⁸ Some commentators apply to this verse that the author warns Christian's involvement in religious drunkenness as it was common in some pagan cultures.²⁹ Galatians 5:21 clearly shows that Paul had strictly warned against drunkenness before, and now also he is warning. 1 Corinthians 6:10 also clearly mentions that drunkards do not belong to the kingdom of God. 1 Peter 4:3 warns them not to live like pagans. It states that drunkenness is the act of pagans.³⁰ Hence, there are commands in New Testament which has clearly and directly forbidden Christian's involvement in drunkenness.

Chapter 5 - Implication to Nepali Christians

²⁶ Seller, *Alcohol Abuse in the Old Testament*, 71-74.

²⁷ Luke 21:34 and Matthew 24:45-51 (New International Version).

²⁸ Ephesians 5:18 (NIV).

²⁹ Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Scotland: T and T Clark Edinburgh, 1998), LDLS.

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:10 and 1 Peter 4:3 (NIV).

In Nepal, alcoholism is one of the most significant problems in the society. There are several cultural values on its use, and it is also available easily in homes, hotels, bars, etc. So, Christians living in such environments are challenged by their influences.

5.1 - Church and Leaders

History has proven that the most critical and single problem pastors faced was the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Today, there are many moral issues like alcoholism, the greatest problem in our community. Church existing in such society cannot and should not reject to deal with those problems. Instead, it is an opportunity for the church to insert some spiritual beliefs in them. Many talk about only the costs and other factors in dealing with the chemical misuse problem. They hardly speak that alcoholism or drug abuse is morally wrong and hampers soul or spiritual growth. So, the church must clarify that it is morally corrupted and should lead in a spiritual pathway. The church should not simply blame the drunkard; instead, provide them pastoral cares viewing the addiction as a disease.³¹

In the Bible, drunkenness has resulted in severe consequences that have negative effects on personal life, family, and social relations. Alcoholism is also a factor that hinders the spirituality of the believer. It ultimately interferes with the spiritual growth of the church. So, church leaders must diligently deal with such problems.

³¹ Morgan, *Practical Theology, Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism*, 35-36.

5.2 - A Christian Family

Alcoholism has destroyed many families and the future of many children. Children are learning to drink from alcoholic parents. Drunkenness has created chaos in the family. The alcoholic becomes irresponsible to family welfare. As a result, family members cannot fulfill their basic needs. Often quarrels occur in the family. This develops negative feelings in children like worry, stress, insecurity, etc. The family with an alcoholic cannot maintain a peaceful environment inside the house. So, a Christian family must be aware of alcoholism and avoid it.

5.3 - A Christian

Christians are influenced by many existing factors of the society on alcoholism. Nevertheless, those influential factors can be resisted by them.³² Christians must know that they belong to God as their body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. So, they cannot be addicted to any kinds of drugs like alcohol. Many alcohol abusers take alcohol as a problem solver because they think it helps them forget sorrows when they drink. But soon, it will start controlling the drinker's life. So, Christians should not let any sin such as alcoholism control their lives, as the Bible instructs in Romans 6:12. Many Christians have close friends who drink alcohol excessively. Frequently, mingling with such friends may tempt them to do so as the Bible says bad company corrupts good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33). So,

³² June Hunt, Counseling through your Bible Handbook (Oregon: Counseling through your bible handbook, 2008), Christian Library.

Christians should not participate with those who abuse alcohol (Proverbs 23:20).³³

Satan is the father of lies and a deceiver. Satan makes many Christians believe that they are addicts, drunkards, useless, hopeless, guilty of sin, etc. Furthermore, such lies keep them far from the truth that sets them free. And in their hopeless situation and guilt, they may fall into bondages like alcoholism, sexual immorality, etc. So, Christians must be aware of their identity in Christ that they are the conquerors whom God has given victory through Lord Jesus Christ. That makes them able to resist the devil and all his lies. Therefore, Christians must believe the truth rather than the lies of Satan. Then the one who knows the truth will not fall into alcoholism.³⁴

Conclusion

Alcoholism has become the greatest problem. In Nepal, the excessive use of alcohol is not controlled by the government. It is easily available. It has cultural values and religious practices. As a result, many people consume it incredibly, which has adverse effects on family, society, person, etc. Many Christians are influenced by such an environment and drinking alcohol. Some Christians even have fallen into alcoholism. Hence, alcoholism should be avoided among Christians as Bible has clearly condemned drunkenness.

³³ Hunt, *Alcohol and Drug Abuse*, "What is substance abuse."

³⁴ Neil T. Anderson and Mike and Julia Quarles, *Freedom from Addiction: Breaking the Bondage of Addiction and Finding Freedom in Christ* (U.S.A.: Regal Books, 1996), Christian Library.

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